We Made Them Heroes (That's What We Told Them)

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War is cruel and unforgiving and time does not, can not, will not stop for the grieving children broken by it. They rise with the sun and don their armor once more, but in the night, there is darkness and there is pain and there is grief and its cold embrace can be hard to escape.

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Introduction
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HEEEYYYYY!

So, I promised a lot of people that I was gonna do another Attack on Titan thing with parental!Levi and Hange. So here it is! This one is a lot darker, so heads up for that. There's a lot more Levi and Hange interaction, as well. It's all platonic, but they're very close, just as a side effect of having survived so long together.

They are a little OOC, but I did my best, and let them get drunk as a sort of excuse for the OOCness. Hopefully it's not too bad.

SPOILERS: Season one of Attack on Titan, specifically the last two episodes.

WARNINGS: IMPORTANT PLEASE READ: There is graphic self-harm and a graphic suicide attempt in the first bit of this story. I will mark that section with a ** when the self-harm begins and I'll put another ** when the suicide attempt is over so you can skip that whole part if you want to. PLEASE READ RESPONSIBLY!

DISCLAIMER: I don't own a single character from the show.

Enjoy!

We Made Them Heroes (That's What We Told Them)

Eren stared down at his hands.

The hands that had killed one hundred and sixty-eight people today.

When he'd thrown Annie into that building, he'd just been trying to knock her down long enough for somebody to get in a good hit on her nape while she was stunned.

But there had been people in that building. And now forty-eight of them were dead.

The buildings they'd crashed through and the rubble raining from the sky had claimed one hundred and twenty more lives.

Because of him.

He doubled over, sobs dragging up from his very soul, his fingers tightening in his hair. His pain was quiet, his tears soundless, but fall they did. He pulled his knees to his chest and curled into the smallest ball possible on his dungeon cot, unable to think, unable to breathe past the *guilt* and *pain* and *hate* swirling in his mind, all centered on himself.

What have I done?!

He opened his mouth, but he couldn't scream.

He could only shake and cry and hate himself *so much* , but he couldn't make a sound.

He stared at his shaking hands, seeing the blood on them.

So much blood…

****** He surged abruptly to his feet, balling up his left fist and slugging the wall as hard as he could.

There was a brutal *crack* as most of his knuckles gave way. He did the same with his right hand.

Crack .

Left.

Crack.

Right.

Crack.

Left.

Crack.

Right.

Over and over and over until the blood was pouring from his mangled fingers, splattered against the wall, dripping down his arms, staining his clothes, his skin, his *soul* with a dark crimson that could never be washed off.

The only sound to be heard in the dungeon was the harsh snaps of breaking bones, hissing steam and the smell of ozone as his *freakish, mutated* body tried to heal him, followed by more sharp snaps as he hit the wall harder, desperate to *hurt* himself as permanently as he'd hurt everyone else.

The scar on Mikasa's face from when Eren tried to kill her.

Armin's earth-shattering screams every night as his mind tortured him with memories of his squad's deaths—deaths that occurred while they were following Eren.

Gunther, sliced neatly from collarbone to pelvis.

Oluo, a bloody smear across five tree trunks.

Eld, in two pieces in a forest far, far away.

Petra, crushed to a pulp against a tree.

Eren hit the wall harder.

His wrist shattered.

He didn't stop.

He could still remember how her father had screamed when they told him.

Could remember Eld's wife, her desperate sobs and quiet pleas that no one answered.

Oluo's nephews, one folding to the ground, the other lashing out and having to be restrained.

Gunther's father, turning white as a sheet and full out collapsing, unconscious. His mother's wide eyes and open mouth.

Levi, his eyes black and empty and *sad* , emptying two full bottles of hard alcohol and *tearing his office apart* , shattering glasses, breaking chairs, shredding papers and finally collapsing in the middle of the wreckage and *screaming* .

Erwin, dropping to his knees and wrapping his arms around his Captain in the middle of the night and holding him as he *cried* for the soldiers Eren had as good as murdered.

His left forearm shattered to the elbow.

He still didn't stop.

It should have been me.

I should have died instead.

They should still be here.

I should not be here.

He finally slowed, heaving for breath around his sobs.

He stared at the wall with unseeing eyes, not acknowledging the blood splattered over it, pooled on the floor, or streaked up his mutilated hands and arms.

I should not be here.

He turned slowly and walked over to where his ODM was sitting on a chair in the corner of his cell.

I do not deserve to be here.

He disassembled it until he could yank free a decently sized, razor-sharp piece of metal.

I deserve to die.

It took him far longer than it should have, due to his utterly ruined hands.

I do not deserve to be rescued.

He set the blade against his forearm, staring at it with dull eyes.

I do not deserve to be saved.

The blade sank through so deeply it came out the other side of his arm.

I am evil.

He dragged it down his arm, numb to the agony lighting up in his mind.

I am not human.

He ripped it out and stabbed it into the other arm, tearing it open from wrist to elbow.

I am a monster.

Blood gushed from the wounds, leaving him lightheaded in moments.

I do not deserve to live.

He started gasping weakly for air, his limbs growing heavy.

I deserve to die.

He sagged against the wall, tilting his head back and closing his eyes, waiting for his legs to fold, his lungs to still, his heart to stop.

I deserve to die alone.

There was a sharp hiss of steam, and the smell of ozone filled the cell.

The lightheadedness faded.

His breathing steadied.

His eyes snapped open, looking down at his arms—at his flawless, completely healed arms.

He was perfectly *fine.*

Eren's legs gave out.

He crashed to his knees.

And he finally screamed. **

Eren sat on the cold stone floor, staring unseeingly at his bloodstained hands.

He didn't hear the door at the top of the stairs open.

Didn't hear the footsteps coming down.

Didn't see the light of the lantern.

Didn't hear the muffled curse as whoever it was fought with the rusty lock.

Didn't hear the hoarse gasp, or the lantern crashing into the floor.

Didn't hear them *run* to him.

Didn't hear them calling his name.

He just stared at his hands.

His wretched, healed, murdering hands.

I am such a monster.

I can't even die.

Another tear slipped down his face to join the countless others he'd already shed.

A stinging pain suddenly erupted in his right cheek, and he jerked, blinking rapidly as his senses started taking in information again.

Someone was shaking him, *hard.*

And screaming.

"*— REN!"* They were shouting. " *I SWEAR TO THE WALLS, BRAT! WAKE UP! WAKE THE HELL UP! EREN!"*

"C—Captain?" the boy rasped, his voice hoarse, forcing his eyes to focus.

His Captain was on his knees beside him, face whiter than he'd ever seen it, sheer panic in those steely silver eyes.

"Eren," he gasped, his hands trembling as they gripped the boy's shoulders so tightly Eren could feel the bruises forming and fading away. The man yanked him forward, pulling him to his chest and squeezing him hard.

"C—Captain?!" he said again, his eyes widening in shock. "Wh-what are you—"

"Shut up, brat!" the Captain barked. He twisted his fingers in Eren's hair and held him closer. "Just…just shut up."

"Y-yes, sir," Eren stammered.

The man held him for a long moment before suddenly shoving him back against the wall, his eyes hardening.

"What happened?" he demanded.

Eren swallowed hard and glanced to the side. "Nothing…"

"Nothing?" Levi said incredulously. "There's blood *dripping down the wall* and you're just…" his voice trembled a little bit. "Just *sitting* here, covered in it, and looking more dead than alive."

"I can't die," Eren whispered, lowering his head and feeling his eyes sting again. "I can't die, Captain. I can't die, I *can't—"*

"Hey, calm down, brat," the man sounded startled as the boy started shaking. "It's al—wait. What do you mean by *can't* ?"

"I can't die," he said, a crazed laugh tearing out of him. "I can't die, Captain. My body won't let me die. I can't scar. I can't be injured. I can't die. *I can't die, Captain.* "

Levi's fingers clamped down on his shoulders hard enough to hurt. "Are you telling me that you did this to yourself?" his voice was low and cold and Eren sobbed.

"I can't *die,* " he gasped, fingers tearing at his hair.

Levi grabbed the sides of his head, forcing him up and face to face with him.

"Jaeger," the Captain's voice was still cold. "Are you telling me that you did this to yourself?"

Eren nodded helplessly as another tear escaped. "Yes, sir," he whispered.

Levi's face grew murderous. "Why," he said through gritted teeth.

"Because I killed one hundred and sixty-eight people today, sir," Eren answered softly.

Levi's eyes widened. "What?"

"I killed one hundred and—" Eren's voice broke. "—and sixty-eight people today."

The Captain stared at him. "Eren…"

"I allowed Petra, Eld, Oluo, and Gunther to be murdered," Eren continued. "I got my own squad killed at Trost. Mina, Thomas, Marco, Natt, Milieus—"

"Jaeger, stop!" Levi interrupted. He clasped both sides of the boy's head, almost gently. "Stop. Just…just stop."

Eren sagged against his hold, closing his eyes. "I'm a monster and I deserve to die," he whispered. "So I tried. But I can't. I *can't* . My body won't let me."

Levi let out a long, shuddering breath and pulled Eren forward again, letting the boy rest his head against his shoulder. "Shut up, brat." His hand came up to grip the back of Eren's neck, covering and protecting his nape. The hand was shaking. "Just…just shut up."

Eren closed his eyes and didn't fight the tears streaming down his face. "I got your family killed," he whispered. "Why don't you hate

me?"

There was silence for a long moment, and then his Captain exhaled sharply and held him tighter. "Because there's still one left," he rasped out. "And it's *you,* you absolute *idiot.* You're the only one I have left, and I *will not* lose you. I most certainly will not lose you to *yourself.* You are not a monster, Eren. Their deaths were not your fault. They died because of the Titans. They died fighting for what they believed in."

"They died afraid," Eren choked out.

Levi carded his fingers through his hair. "They died knowing they would not be forgotten," he corrected. "They died knowing that we would avenge them."

"But I didn't," the boy cried, shaking fingers coming up and twisting into his Captain's jacket. "I *didn't* , Captain. I froze. As soon as I saw her. I had the chance, and I—I couldn't do it. And I killed *one hundred and sixty-eight innocent people.* "

He trembled, clinging to his Captain, unable to stop the fresh wave of sobs.

Levi closed his eyes, feeling Eren's tears soak into his shoulder.

"Oh, brat," he sighed, tightening his grip on the kid. "It's not your fault. She was your friend. You're too loyal, kid."

Eren shook his head again. "I failed, Captain."

" *No,* " Levi said sharply. "You did *not* fail. Those people who died? That blood is on Annie's hands, not yours. You were following my orders and Erwin's orders. If she had surrendered, there wouldn't have been a single casualty. You did the best you could, Eren."

Eren nodded a little bit, but Levi knew he didn't believe him.

The older man closed his eyes, his jaw tightening.

It wasn't fair.

This kid was just fifteen years old. He shouldn't be holding the weight of the entire world on his shoulders. He should be worrying about school and chores and girls. Not a war.

"I'm sorry," Eren whispered. "I'm so sorry, Captain."

Levi pressed the brat's head tighter against his shoulder. "I forgive you, brat," he murmured. "In my opinion there's nothing to forgive you for, but if you need it, you have it."

Eren made a lost, confused, desperately grateful sound and clung to him harder. "Thank you," he whispered.

Levi propped his chin on the kid's head. "You're welcome, brat," he said.

He let Eren stay where he was until his tears died down before he rose to his feet, lifting the kid with him. "Come on."

"Where—where are we going?"

"To the showers—you're disgusting. Also, you're an idiot and managed to soak your entire cot in your own blood, so you'll be staying with me until it gets cleaned up. Brat."

Eren shot a glance at the pristine blankets and pillows on his cot. Not a drop of blood to be found.

Levi refused to meet his eyes or verbally acknowledge that he just wanted the kid with him because he was worried about him and just needed to be able to wake up in the night and see Eren's chest rising and falling and *alive.*

Eren hiccupped a shaky laugh. "Thank you, sir," he said again, his voice hoarse from his tears, and Levi knew he understood, because

he *still* hadn't loosened his grip on Levi's jacket even a little bit.

"Whatever, brat," Levi rolled his eyes and gently shoved the kid. "Move it."

Eren followed him up the stairs, one hand still caught in the hem of Levi's jacket.

Once they reached the Captain's room, Levi took the kid by the shoulders and directed him into the bathroom. "Shower," he said firmly. "Then sleep."

"Yes, sir," Eren said, weaving on his feet. The day had certainly taken its toll on the boy.

Once he heard the water running, Levi stepped out and headed for Hange's quarters. He, Hange, and Moblit all lived on this hall. Erwin's rooms were a hall over. He needed to borrow some clothes from her. Levi's own things would be too big for Eren's slender body but too short for his long limbs, and the brat would *drown* in anything of Erwin's. But Hange was about the right size. Plus, she was scattered enough to not care why exactly he wanted some of her clothes.

He knocked on the door with no regard for the late hour. Hange didn't operate like a normal person. If she was actually asleep, he'd eat his own cravat.

There was no answer and he knocked again, harder.

Nothing.

Levi rolled his eyes. "FOUR EYES!" he barked. "You have ten seconds to open this door before I break it down."

He kept up a count in his head and was drawing back to follow through on his threat when the door flew open and Hange exploded out of it, glasses askew and eyes wild.

"MOBLIT!" she shrieked, throwing her arms in the air. The sheaf of papers she'd been clutching scattered about three feet over their heads and began falling around them like snow. "IT WORKED!"

Cackling like the maniac she was, Hange grabbed Levi and started spinning around in a circle.

"FOUR-EYES!" Levi thundered. He planted a boot in her abdomen and kicked her across the hall.

She *bounced* off the wall and literally danced around him, snatching papers out of the air.

"Sorry, my precious midget!" she said. "Thought you were Moblit! Say, where is he?" she finally stopped running in circles and started bouncing on her toes, blinking and looking around for her faithful second.

Levi massaged the bridge of his nose and reminded himself that humanity couldn't afford to lose him to prison for murdering his fellow Scout.

"Moblit," he said through gritted teeth. "Is in bed like the other *normal* humans. Because it is *three o'clock in the morning, you moron.* "

"Oh," Hange blinked at him. "And you are still awake why?"

Levi swallowed hard, not willing to admit he'd dozed off at his desk and been driven screaming from his slumber with his family's dead bodies flashing before his eyes and a *need* to make sure Eren was alright pounding through his veins. "I haven't been to bed yet," he said, crossing his arms and slumping against the wall. "I was busy."

Hange stopped bouncing, a slight furrow forming between her brows as she fully focused on him. Her brown eyes grew serious.

"Levi," she said, voice steady.

He rolled his eyes. "Calm down, Four-Eyes," he grumbled. "This isn't about me. It's about Jaeger."

Hange gave him a sharp look that told him *We are so not done talking about this you did **not** fool me with that and we **will** be returning to this topic* but let him get away with it.

"What about Eren?"

Levi started to answer before thinking better of it. "I need to borrow a shirt and pants," he said instead.

She was really worried now, Levi could see it in her shadowed eyes and too-wide smile. "Of course!"

She bolted into her room/office and was back in a handful of seconds with the requested items.

"Thank you, Hange," he said quietly, taking them from her with a small nod. "I'll explain later, I promise."

"I'm holding you to that," she answered, offering a quick smile.

He felt her eyes following him back down the hall to his own rooms.

He felt a quick flash of gratitude for Hange Zoe. If you ignored the fact that she was insane and an idiotic four-eyes who never shut up, she cared about the people she considered her own. For some reason, she had decided Levi was one of them. Without his permission, mind you. She had a big heart, and it was rarely, if ever, focused on herself. Levi absently wondered just how long it had been since Hange slept for more than forty minutes between experiments.

"Tch," he hissed as he shut the door behind him.

Alright, so maybe Four-Eyes had grown on him. A bit like mold, but there she was.

He'd explain this whole thing to her after he'd gotten Eren settled for the night. It was the least she deserved.

The brat was just toweling his hair dry when he returned, blinking slowly and movements clumsy with exhaustion.

"Here," Levi tossed the clothes to him. "Those should fit."

"Thank you, Sir," Eren said, his voice a hoarse whisper.

Levi turned away as he dressed, directing his attention to turning down the sheets and dimming the lamps. He looked back at the brat when he heard a badly-muffled yawn.

Hange's clothes were the slightest bit too big, the sleeves falling just over Jaeger's fingers and the cuffs of the pants reaching the floor. Other than that, they were fine.

"In the bed, kid," Levi said, blaming the lateness of the hour for the softness in his voice.

Eren was too tired to argue, yawning again as he toppled over into the soft sheets.

"Tch," Levi huffed, fondness welling in his chest. "Brat."

He dragged the blankets over the kid's head and settled himself on the edge of the mattress, chin resting on his steepled hands as he savored the moment of peace, hearing the kid's breathing begin to deepen. Jaeger rolled over onto his side, so he was facing Levi, knocking one of the blankets off.

"Thank you," Eren mumbled.

"What for?" Levi said quietly, tucking the blanket back over his shoulder.

"Coming to get me," the kid yawned yet again, not even opening his eyes.

And suddenly Levi was swallowing hard to get the lump out of his throat. He ruffled Eren's hair, unable to answer. But he didn't need to.

Eren was already asleep.

Levi sat on the edge of the bed for a good hour, watching and making sure Eren was truly, peacefully asleep. A couple of nightmares tried to take hold, but they were easily chased away.

Once he was satisfied that the brat would sleep until morning, he rose. Locking the door behind him, he walked back down the hall to Hange's room, loosening his cravat along the way.

He leaned against the doorframe as he raised his hand to knock but hadn't even touched the door when it swung open.

Hange was there, still dressed, glasses shoved up into her wild hair and serious concern written into every line of her face and her too-expressive eyes.

He sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose as he walked past her. She had gotten a fire started in the hearth and managed to clear all of her crap out of two chairs. A small table with a steaming pot of tea and two cups sat between them, and Levi felt some of the tension draining out of him at the sight.

A wadded-up ball of clothes hit the side of his head and he instinctively caught them before they could hit the floor. He found a bandage tangled up in them as well.

"Change out of your uniform and let me wrap your leg," Hange said firmly, no room for negotiation in her voice. "You've been on your feet all day."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "And how long, exactly, have you been on yours at this point?"

She opened her mouth to respond before hesitating. Her eyes unfocused. "Well, I actually slept through the night…yesterday? No, the day before…wait…Okay, so this is…what day is this?" she muttered, clearly talking to herself.

Levi snorted. "Tch. What an idiot."

Hange grinned. "Oh, well. Not important. But if it bothers you that much, I'll change, too."

He rolled his eyes. Some days, working with Hange Zoe was like working with a toddler. A screaming, constantly babbling, hyper-active toddler utterly incapable of taking care of herself.

The two didn't bother turning away or going to the other room to change. When you were on an expedition in the middle of Titan-country, things like modesty ceased to exist. They had worked side by side long enough that it no longer bothered them.

As soon as they were in the soft, comfortable clothing (Levi didn't even want to know how she'd gotten her grimy, twitchy little fingers on his clothes) Hange dragged him over to the chairs and practically bullied a cup of tea into his hands as she knelt in front of him. He sipped it as she rolled up his pants leg, cutting off the old bandage and using the new one to wrap the injury with an expertise that came from years of practice. He relaxed into the chair with a sigh as she finished up. She had spiked the tea with painkillers that wouldn't knock him out, he knew, and he couldn't deny that he felt worlds better than he had when he entered the room.

At least physically.

Hange plopped back into her own chair and leaned forward, the firelight reflecting in her eyes.

"Talk to me, Levi," she said, elbows on her knees. "What's going on?"

Levi took a long sip of tea.

He inhaled slowly, opened his mouth…and couldn't even get the words out.

He exhaled sharply in frustration, his free hand clenching tightly around the arm of his chair and Hange held up a hand. She darted out of her seat and clambered up another chair and jumped from one table to another—somehow not falling and killing herself in the process—before climbing straight up one of her bookshelves until she could open a hidden compartment between the top of the shelf and the ceiling. She reached way, way far back in before giving a triumphant whoop.

"Got it!" she managed to return to her seat in one piece, proudly displaying the bottle of alcohol in one hand.

Levi raised an eyebrow at her. "What moron thought it was a good idea to give you alcohol?" he asked bluntly.

"I have to keep stealing them," she whined. "Because Moblit says I can't be trusted with it! *I* have to steal them because *he* keeps stealing them from *me!"*

Levi rested his forehead in his hand with a heavy sigh.

"But oh, well," she shrugged. "Now I have one and he doesn't know. Cheers."

She gestured with the bottle and he rolled his eyes but drained all the tea from his cup anyway. He held it towards her and she filled it all the way up before doing the same to her own cup.

While not quite as sturdy as Levi, Hange was still quite capable of holding her alcohol, so they had made it just under halfway through the bottle by the time Levi found his words.

"I was going to check on the brat before I turned in for the night," he said, monotone to hide how his hands were starting to shake. "When I got down to the cell, I found Eren sitting unresponsive in the corner covered in blood. There was more blood splattered up the wall a few feet away, enough that it had run down to form a pool on the floor." He had to put the teacup down before he dropped it. "His ODM gear had been disassembled. It took a bit to rouse him, but once I did, he said…" Levi closed his eyes and breathed in and out, slowly, remembering how white Eren's face had been, how hard he'd been trembling.

" *I can't die. I can't die, Captain. I can't die, I can't…My body won't let me die. I can't scar. I can't be injured. I can't die. I can't die, Captain."*

The words echoed in Levi's head, and he took a sizeable gulp of alcohol.

Hange's head was lowered, fingers twisted into her hair. "He tried to kill himself, didn't he," she murmured. It wasn't a question.

Levi nodded.

Hange let out a great shuddering breath, pressing one hand to her eyes. Her teeth sank into her lip. "We are supposed to be protecting him," she hissed, fury in her shaking voice. "He's fifteen years old, and we are supposed to be *protecting* him." She shot to her feet, long leg lashing out and kicking over a table full of files that were no doubt incredibly important.

Levi took another long gulp. It burned on the way down, but he didn't care.

Hange started laughing, sharp and not amused at all. "He's *fifteen* ," she snarled, and Levi didn't know who she was angry at.

Herself, him, Erwin, the world at large…who knew.

"He's fifteen," she repeated, voice cracking. "And he tried to kill himself after he was locked in a dark cell like something less than human when he is the *most* human person I have *ever* met and—" she let out another helpless sound of—

Rage?

Pain?

Levi didn't know.

She kicked her chair clear across the room before folding to her knees, arms wound around her stomach.

They sat in silence for a time.

"What have we done, Levi?" she asked him, voice soft.

"What do you mean?" he answered, not taking his eyes off the fire.

"We turn children into soldiers and we march them into hell," she said. Another bitter laugh tore out of her. "We turn them into weapons and use them until they break. No." She shook her head. "We're worse than that. They break, but we keep using them. We use them until there is nothing left. Until whatever family they might possibly still have doesn't even get a body back to bury."

She raked her fingers through her hair. Her hands were shaking.

He exhaled slowly, tilting his head against the back of his chair. "Somebody told him how many people died in Stohess today," he told the ceiling. He barely recognized his own voice.

Hange was on her feet in less than a second.

" *What?!"* she hissed, fury blackening her face.

Levi lowered his eyes to meet hers and felt vindictive satisfaction welling up in his chest. Whoever had done that was going to regret

the day they were born once Hange got her hands on them. And she would find them. Of that he had no doubt.

"That was why…" she trailed off, devastation sweeping across her face.

Levi clenched his jaw and averted his eyes again, nodding tightly. "He knew the exact number," he murmured. "He kept repeating it. Over and over. One hundred—"

"—and sixty-eight," Hange finished, sagging back to the floor. "I know." She looked up at him, and there was something raw and hurting in her eyes that he hadn't seen in a long time. "Why is there a fifteen-year-old child chained up like an animal in the cellar slicing himself open because the world blames him for the death of one hundred and sixty-eight people?"

Her voice rang years younger than she was and Levi closed his eyes, hands tightening to fists. The cup shattered in his hand. Neither of them moved to clean it up.

She brought her legs to her chest, curling her arms around her knees and resting her chin on her arms.

"What have we done?" she repeated, and her tears traced trails of gold down her face.

She leaned against his legs and he tangled a hand in her hair. He was pulling too tight, he knew, but she didn't say anything. A knot of something hot and desperate and hurt and *angry* wrenched tighter in Levi's chest.

"We made them *heroes,* " he spit out. "We sent them out to bleed and die for us and we sat back to watch as they screamed over the mutilated bodies of their loved ones."

Hange's shoulders shook and she turned to press her face into the side of his knee. He could feel her tears soaking into his pants, but

he didn't care. Just cradled the back of her head and stared into the fire, clenching his other hand into a trembling fist.

Hange laughed, high and unhinged and shattered. "And we say the Titans are monsters," she got out. "What a joke. What a *joke.* "

Levi just stared into the fire.

"We told them humanity is *worth saving,* " she choked out bitterly. "We told them humanity is *good.* But *we're* the ones training our children to scream and bleed and *die.* Yet we're *worth saving.* " Another sick giggled spilled past her lips. "What a *joke.* "

Her laughter broke into tears and she curled up tighter, one hand coming up to clamp over her mouth as her whole body shook with the force of her cries.

Levi watched the flames dance in the darkness, watched them play over Hange's shaking body.

" *What have we done?!* " she cried.

She wasn't talking to him, but he answered anyway.

"We made them *heroes,* " he said, unable to stop himself. He tipped his head back, feeling a tell-tale burning in his own eyes. "We took them and we did to them what the world did to us. It's our legacy. A road paved with the broken, bloody bodies of children who died afraid and with no one to save them."

He closed his eyes as his tears made burning trails down his face.

"We made them *heroes* ," he repeated, taking a shuddering inhale.

Hange laughed again, harsh and sharp. "No, we didn't," she said hoarsely. "We made them *invisible.* We made them *expendable.* No one remembers them. No one weeps for them. No one remembers them because we spend their lives like pocket change. They're gone so fast it's as though they were never here at *all.* "

Her words struck him in the heart with all the power of one of the Female Titan's devastating blows and all of his air rushed out of him.

He pressed his trembling hand over his eyes. His other hand twisted tighter in Hange's hair.

"So we did," he said, so quiet he could barely hear himself.

A bitter, exhausted laugh hitched out of his throat. "I'm tired, Hange," he whispered. "I feel *worn out* . I feel old and tired so very, very sick of watching children die in fear."

Her shaking fingers reached up, latching around his wrists and *pulling* . He slid out of his chair at her prompting and fell to his knees on the floor. Her tears turned to gold in the firelight as he roughly dragged her into an embrace, letting her cry into his shoulder. He settled himself more comfortably on the floor, leaning back against his chair and staring up at the ceiling.

A distant part of his mind knew that the only reason their emotions were so out of control was because they were drunk. Logically, the only reason they were having this conversation at all was because they were drunk and tired and sad. But…

He knew these weren't drunk thoughts. He'd been thinking them for years. He knew Hange had been.

Because while her parade rest stance never wavered, her salute never faltered, Hange *cried* at every funeral service. She closed her eyes and whispered her farewells to the wind because the ones they were intended for were cold, cold, cold and dead, dead, dead and they probably didn't even have a body to bury.

He had no idea how she had the strength to cry for each one. If he tried, he would have run out of tears *years* ago.

He closed his eyes and tilted his head against Hange's, letting out a long sigh.

It almost felt relieving to finally voice all the poisoned ideas that had been building up in him for years. To know that someone else felt the same, shared his helpless rage and pain…

"They think I don't care," he whispered, because screw it. He might as well.

Hange choked on a hysterical giggle. "They think I consider them all statistics and experiments," she whispered back.

Levi swallowed the broken sound before it could crawl out of his throat.

"I can't care," he whispered. "Because I know that I'm going to survive. They're not. I can't care. I can't care like you, Hange. I'm not…" He took a shaky breath. "I'm not strong enough for that. Humanity's Strongest." He scoffed. "I can't do it. There's only so many I can care about."

She nodded, curling closer and throwing her legs over his lap. "I know," she said quietly. "You're strong enough for us. You know that, don't you?"

He nodded, allowing himself to lean on her. "If I lose one of you," he breathed out. "I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I think I'm going to lose my mind," she said frankly. She sniffed, but her tears seemed to be mostly under control again. "I think if I lose you, or Erwin, or Moblit, I'm going to go absolutely, stark raving mad. I'll snap. I'll hurt someone. I don't know. Some days I think I'm halfway there already. I don't know how Moblit has stayed as sane as he is."

"Don't ask me," Levi muttered, grabbing the bottle off the table and taking a long swig. "He works with *you* every day. Anyone else would have had their brain fried years ago and be off drooling in the corner."

She exploded into giggles, but genuine ones this time. She snatched the bottle from him, but poured hers into her cup, knowing he couldn't stand drinking directly after someone.

"Not to mention he's kept you from literally jumping into a Titan's mouth to see what they're like on the inside at least four times," Levi huffed.

"But I could totally do it!" Hange argued. She flailed her way into an upright position and slammed her elbow into his stomach without even noticing. "Just think about it! If I had full ODM gear and made it through without getting caught in the teeth, I could *definitely do it* ! It's completely possible! I could take notes and make all the observations I want to and then just cut myself out!"

Levi wheezed, kicking Hange off onto the floor and trying to get his breath back. "You're *insane,* Four-Eyes," he rasped.

"That's what Moblit says!" she whined, sprawling out on the rug in front of him.

"And you wonder why he doesn't let you drink," Levi snorted, taking another long gulp.

Hange laughed a little bit, throwing one of her arms over her eyes.

They sat in silence for a little bit, sipping their drinks.

"Levi?" Hange said quietly. "What are we going to do about Eren?"

Levi snorted. "You really think I'm the person to ask? Look at how I'm dealing with my problems. I don't sleep, I drink, and I terrify everyone else into submission. I am *obviously* the pinnacle of mental health."

She laughed sadly. "I can't stop," she said. "If I stop, I think. And if I think, I can't stop *thinking.* And…" she lifted her head slightly and let it *thunk* back to the floor.

Levi's eyes were caught by the fire once more.

A minute or an hour could have passed and then Hange was crawling back over to him, making herself comfortable under his arm and pouring herself another glass.

They passed the bottle back and forth until it was empty.

Then Hange slung her legs over his again and thumped her head down on his shoulder.

"I don't like thinking," she told his collarbone, very seriously. "Well, I do, but I don't like sad thinking. Science thinking is *fun* . Because it's not sad, and maybe it means I can keep someone else alive just a little longer."

Levi tightened the arm on her shoulders. "We've saved a lot of people, you and I," he murmured.

Hange smiled, and it was one of the saddest things he'd ever seen. "But we'll never save enough," she whispered. "Not until we can save all of them."

He sighed. "That's why you and Jaeger get along," he said, yanking on her hair affectionately. "You want to save everyone."

She shrugged. "I get where he's coming from," she said, leaning her forehead against his neck. "Eren, I mean. What he did today. Tonight. Um, yesterday." She yawned. "He wants to save people. He doesn't want to hurt people. And…purpose or not, he…he hurt people today. Yesterday. Whatever." She yawned again. "I bet he started thinking. I bet he started thinking sad thoughts. And I bet he couldn't stop."

Levi closed his eyes, leaning his head into hers for just a few moments. "I have no idea what to do about it," he muttered. "Obviously, I don't want the brat hurting himself. But I…" he trailed off.

"Have the emotional range of a teaspoon of granite and no human decency to speak of?" Hange suggested.

He glared at her, but her eyes were closed. She yawned again, her cup almost dropping out of her fingers. Levi sighed, taking it from her and setting it up on the table.

"Come on, you," he said quietly. "Let's get you to bed."

"Hmm, okay," she snuggled closer. "I'm good here."

He snorted. "Very funny, Four-Eyes. Let's go."

She groaned but allowed him to pry her off the floor and over to her bed…only to stop and stare in disbelief at the sheer volume of…of… he didn't even know what half of that stuff *was,* but he was pretty sure at least a third of it was *not* safe for humans.

He tipped his head back on his neck with a laugh. "The fact that you are still alive, Hange Zoe," he breathed out, "is a fact that never ceases to amaze me."

"Thank Moblit," she muttered around another yawn. "Pretty sure it's his fault."

"Tch," Levi rolled his eyes, unable to bite back his smile. "Come on, idiot. You can share with Eren. I'll take the couch."

"Mmmmmmkay," she hummed, not even paying attention anymore.

Somehow, he managed to get the two of them back to his room without waking Moblit. He got Hange settled next to Eren without disturbing the boy and collected a blanket and pillow for himself. He sank down onto the couch situated across the room from the bed and curled under the blanket with a long sigh.

One of the lamps was still lit, and Levi knew that he should blow it out for the night.

Instead, he watched the flames dance.

Remembered the firelight on Eren's blood and desperate pleas. Remembered the firelight on Hange's tears and broken laughter. Remembered the firelight on the letters from Oluo's family. Remembered the firelight on Gunther's disassembled gear, polished mirror-bright. Remembered the firelight on Eld's maps and books. Remembered the firelight on Petra's shining hair and warm eyes.

Levi stared at the tiny, dancing flame and he remembered all the lives that were just as bright, just as wild, just as fragile *(just as priceless, just as unique, just as beautiful, just as irreplaceable)* until he fell asleep.

" *And the sea will grant each man new hope as sleep brings dreams of home."*

~Christopher Columbus

So there's that.

Um, sorry? I know I said I was going to end it happy, but I just...I don't know, I just figured that's a little more realistic for their situation. I know they were pretty OOC, and I am sorry about that, but hopefully you enjoyed it anyway!

Loved it, hated it, let me know! More reviews for me mean more stories for you!